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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.



Dear Dick:

Continuing the line of discussion opened with you on Wednesday, 26 May 71, I am most anxious, as I know you are, to achieve better utilization of our U-2R aircraft. In particular, I feel the altitude advantage and comparatively low risk associated with U-2 employment in a peripheral reconnaissance role make it an attractive alternate to some of the existing airborne intelligence collection platforms. For example, there is pressing need for [redacted] The difficulty is that the present U-2 split fleet arrangement hampers achievement of optimum utilization and flexibility in use of the total resource.

In addition to assigned photo reconnaissance missions, the Air Force fleet has been providing test aircraft for accomplishment of two developmental tasks. The first of these, the [redacted] system is now ready for use and will provide a much needed addition to the [redacted] capability.

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USA 25X1 I have directed deployment of a three aircraft task force to SEA. Employment of the U-2R for this purpose in the Gulf of Tonkin will enable the JCS to release some multi-engine ACRP aircraft from assignment to that area to cover other important intelligence targets. Furthermore, use of the U-2 will reduce the requirement for the protective fighter cover needed by other manned reconnaissance platforms.

The current target date for operational readiness of the [redacted] task force is 15 August 1971. Positioning of three [redacted] U-2 aircraft in SEA on a continuing

OSD REVIEW COMPLETE

USAF review(s) completed.

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basis, together with extended use of a fourth aircraft as an experimental test bed [redacted] makes it virtually impossible for the Air Force to meet combined commitments for Cuba overflight missions proficiency training of an increased number of aircrews and rotation of aircraft through normal maintenance with only two aircraft remaining to them.

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The attached paper, with which your staff may already be familiar, examines in some detail a number of alternate approaches to resolving the problem. The alternatives range from minor to major changes in roles and missions, redistribution of aircraft between the two operating fleets, and a number of ways to consolidate all of the aircraft within a single unit.

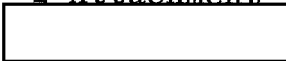
It would appear to me that the minimum action we can take would be the shifting of one aircraft [redacted] to the Air Force. This would be a minimal and, at best, a temporary solution, in that loss of an aircraft by either operating unit would require a review of the whole question. The most satisfactory long range solution appears to be consolidation.

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In view of the growing urgency of this matter, I would appreciate an early expression of your views.

Sincerely,

1 Attachment



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